Lacan named the "button tie" [*le point de capiton*]).[36] It is the *stigmatic* stop of a *coup de force*, it is a punctuating violence done to the music that makes it mean this rather than that—that *pins* it, Lacan would again say, to sing the sadistic pleasure (*jouissance*) rather than stir up self-righteous humanist nausea. And this violence, which *nails*, which *rivets* the music to a meaning, this violence which is in a way its signifying stigma or its internal stigmatology, is what music in turn imprints, from a distance, on those who are the victims of its "no-touch torture."

The phantasm that accompanies or supports the acoustic machine-gunning of musical torture is indeed the mastery of this stigmatization. It is a question of pushing in the nail, from afar and without seeming to touch, in order to signify: thus it is, period.

The violence of musical torture could well be, in the end, the reflection of the violence one inflicts *on* music, when one stops it in the slippage where it defers itself and differs from itself (*se différe*), to rivet it onto the stigmatizing punctuation of a meaning.

And to nail there the subject of its passion.

Translated from the French
by Allison Schifani and Zeke Sikelianos

CHAPTER 13

The Language of Feeling Made into a Weapon: Music as an Instrument of Torture

Christian Grüny

Anyone who first hears about music being used as an instrument of torture will probably react ambivalently: on the one hand, he or she will be surprised that such a sophisticated and ubiquitous cultural practice can indeed be used for torturing people; on the other hand, this will immediately coincide with certain everyday experiences—isn't the hip-hop that the neighbors' son keeps blasting through the house or, alternatively, the awful dissonances of contemporary music a form of torture? This attitude is reflected in the reaction of a member of the American Musicological Society to a resolution of his organization condemning the use of music as an instrument of torture: "American students now have a precedent to decry 20th-century music surveys—with their compulsory exposure to headache-inducing cacophony and traumatic collisions of sonic debris—as academic torture."[1]

Apparently it is precisely these everyday experiences that lead most people to ridicule and trivialize reports on music torture. Blogs and commentaries are full of more or less aggressive reactions making fun of this phenomenon, and there are plenty of personal torture playlists containing names like Barry Manilow. The attitude behind all this seems to me to be

the following: being annoyed by the neighbors' listening habits or by being exposed to the band one hates most may be called torture in everyday conversation, but of course that's not what it is. It may prevent sleep and work and cause aggression, but this certainly cannot be compared with a real torture victim's anguish. Consequently, this attitude claims, it can't be all that bad, and even if the euphemistic strategies of legitimation employed by the previous US government for practices like waterboarding are repulsive, to consider music as torture is clearly taking things too far.

When we turn to actual victims' reports, the impression is altogether different. Binyam Mohamed and Ruhal Ahmed, whose statements have been widely quoted, were both subjected to a combination of different forms of torture, physical as well as psychological. Both maintain that they found it less difficult to deal with physical violence than with the use of music—they considered the former more predictable and consequently less disturbing. These strategies apparently did not work with music, and both victims talk about their fear of going insane. While the unbearable pain in physical torture is always also directed against the psyche, music seems to take a shortcut, directly attacking the victim's sanity. Being subjected to this form of torture seems to amount to having to watch one's mind fall apart.

My questions in this context are how this drastic encroachment works and what this means for the future of torture: what is it about music that has such an effect? To answer this question, I first describe the context and the situation of its use and then try to outline a conception of music that is consistent with both our everyday understanding and the possibility of its use as an instrument of torture. My premises are that music is indeed used as music, not as a kind of arbitrary noise that is resorted to for the simple reason that it is readily available, and that what is being done really is a form of torture and not a comparably harmless discomfort without any long-term effects.[2]

Music torture is usually subsumed under the category of "psychological" torture. In an obvious way, this makes some sense, but I find it unconvincing in several respects. The methods so termed were devised by the CIA under the impression of the apparent efficacy of the Stalinist show trials. Years of research activity were spent in developing and testing methods that substituted for physical violence, gaining direct access to the victims' psyches.[3] Aiming directly at regression and trauma, these techniques are more openly "psychological" than simple blows. On the other hand, however, it is always the body that is subjected to extreme cold or heat and to sensory deprivation, forced into unbearable positions, and deprived of

any chance to recover. Is the need to sleep psychological or physical? It is obvious that this alternative makes little sense. As we shall see, music poses similar difficulties.

For this reason I find the expression "no-touch torture" more appropriate, a phrase that was apparently coined by the CIA itself: a form of torture where the perpetrators don't dirty their hands or leave visible traces. In most cases these techniques are attractive for very simple pragmatic reasons. A security officer in Zaire (today's Democratic Republic of Congo) who, unlike his colleagues in many other countries, probably had to get by without CIA training, explained his reluctance to subject prisoners to a simple and effective beating as follows: "There will be scars, and then we'll get complaints from Amnesty International."[4] This matter-of-fact statement may sound cynical, but it seems to give a more realistic account of the background of music torture than the CIA's ambitious aims to psychologically reprogram prisoners.

Besides, direct physical violence seems to be as attractive as ever. In this light, Gustav Keller's assessment from his 1981 book on the psychology of torture appears erroneous: "Purely physical torture is losing importance. Psychological and psychiatric findings and methods are taking its place, planned and sometimes administered by white-collar torturers."[5] Even though the techniques that are usually termed psychological have indeed gained importance, there is hardly a substantial decrease in physical torture—Amnesty's complaints don't seem to be that effective, after all. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that most torturers who have added new methods to their repertoire of terror have really drawn on scientific research. The intuitive application of roughly described methods by lay personnel—rank-and-file soldiers in most cases—may do just as well. In the US army, however, even these have experienced a kind of basic torture training—as victims. The so-called Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape Training (SERE) administered by the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency, an institution of the Department of Defense, trains soldiers to resist torture, giving them some firsthand experience. When the Secretary of Defense inquired of the agency in 2008 to what extent the techniques used in training could actively be employed, his question may have been highly unusual, but the ground was well-prepared.[6] Reports of actual incidents of torture in Iraq and Afghanistan show that in some cases CIA members—Keller's white-collar torturers—were involved, but not always. Responsibilities seem to blur among CIA, army, military intelligence, and military police, especially when seemingly harmless instruments like music are employed.

Unlike acoustic bombardment in general, music torture doesn't seem to be part of the CIA experiments and is missing from the "five techniques" that were used in the 1970s against members of the IRA.[7] Nor can it be found in the torture handbooks compiled by the CIA since the 1960s. In US practice it makes its first appearance in a memorandum issued by the commander of the US forces in Iraq, Ricardo S. Sanchez, in 2003.[8] Music now seems to come into play as an instrument that is readily available, whose employment is easy to realize, and which is considered so commonplace that it appears to be relatively harmless.

The contexts in which it was and is employed, however, are far from harmless. In the "black site" in Afghanistan, Binyam Mohamed was detained for months in a dark, dirty cell full of cement dust, where he was repeatedly handcuffed to the walls or the ceiling. Donald Vance, an employee of a security company in Iraq, was held in a cell cooled down to an extremely low temperature. Both report on being subjected to incessant music. If I focus on the role of music, this should not be understood as minimizing the impact of all these circumstances—in the case of Binyam Mohamed they probably would have been enough to drive him to the limits of sanity. Still, the particularly disturbing effect of music that the victims describe demands closer investigation.

The actual or supposed effect of music has several aspects I will consider individually. In some cases music really seems to be a simple instance of noise: the "five techniques" mentioned above include sensory overload by constant exposure to extreme noise, which the Royal Ulster Constabulary practiced successfully for years. In this context all kinds of sounds were used, as long as they were loud and annoying enough. From this point of view, the recent use of music may be attributed to the simple fact that it is nearly universally available: most soldiers are able to contribute suitable CDs and MP3s.[9]

In other cases, torturers rely on one aspect of particular types of music, namely metal and rap: the acoustic representation of Western male aggression and violence. Metallica, Rage against the Machine, and Eminem, artists in whose music this second aspect is particularly prominent, all found themselves on top positions in the torture playlists circulating in the media—irrespective of their political orientations.

The third aspect is a genuinely musical quality: its repetitive organization. This feature can be found in such a broad spectrum of music that the actual choice of music is probably fairly arbitrary. Still, if repetitiveness is indeed responsible for some of the most terrifying effects of music torture, it needs some explanation. In fact, to me it appears to be the most decisive

A fourth aspect relates to the cultural associations of specific types of music. This may explain why country music was repeatedly used to push Muslim detainees to their limits.

Lastly, there is the dimension of explicit meaning. In my opinion, this dimension figures primarily in the perpetrators' imagination, but is relatively insignificant for the victims: it may well be that Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA," with its seemingly blatant patriotism—the critical attitudes it expresses will hardly be perceived in this context—is particularly insulting to some people, but I doubt very much that its disturbing effect lasts very long. Moreover, using David Gray's song "Babylon" in Iraq because of geographic associations makes no sense at all. Rather, it seems to point to the unprofessional character of this type of torture, which needs no scientific support to be highly effective. I will omit the aspect of explicit meaning in my discussion because of its relative irrelevance.

It is as commonly known as it is significant that we can close our eyes, but not our ears. We can use our hands to block our ears, but even so we cannot entirely shut out the acoustic world. We say that sounds penetrate our ears, an expression we wouldn't use for the optical realm. More than the visible, the audible is organized around degrees of intensity, and it seems to imply a rather different relation between activity and passivity. Accordingly, Hans Jonas writes in his essay on the "nobility of vision," "In hearing, the percipient is at the mercy of environmental action, which intrudes upon his sensibility without his asking and by mere intensity decides for him which of several qualities distinguishable at the moment is to be the dominant impression."[10]

I note that his formulation is not entirely true: even though we cannot move our ears like our eyes, we can make choices among the audible. Were we not able to block out louder sounds in favor of quieter ones, we couldn't possibly have a conversation in a noisy place. This ability has something to do with the organization of the audible: in focusing on the specific quality of something that is acoustically perceptible, we *comprehend* it in a very basic sense. To isolate a particular sound from the mass of what is audible at a given moment, we have to recognize its quality, and if we want to draw someone's attention to a specific sound, we can't just point to it—we have to describe or imitate it. Language and music, as very distinctly organized, intended acoustic events, facilitate this kind of selective attention and add a whole new layer of meaning to the audible. To be sure, all of this is true only up to a certain threshold, beyond which we are completely at the mercy of the penetrating force of sound.

These features of the audible make music the only form of art that read-

or dance as instruments of torture. Film has a pervasive quality similar to that of music, but is not as effective in overcoming every possible perceptual barrier. The example of Alex's reconditioning in Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*—and in Stanley Kubrick's movie—clearly shows this: in order to secure his exposure to the films he is being required to see, his head needs to be clamped into a vise and his eyes held open. Even so it's hardly possible to achieve the inescapable lack of distance that music imposes.

Besides this, the audible has another specific quality that probably stems from our phylogenetic heritage: what is heard is affectively charged, a quality that is largely independent of its actual volume. Undefined low sounds alert us immediately, and we can only relax when we've identified them as harmless. In this they are similar to something seen out of the corner of one's eye; the periphery of the retina is particularly sensitive to movement. Loud noises appearing unexpectedly cause a strong physical reaction that momentarily blocks out all other sensations. If a noise continues over a long period of time, it leads to lasting physical stress or even psychophysical illness, even if its volume is well below the pain threshold.

When people are exposed to sounds of extreme intensity and long duration, their ability to discern structures decreases. What remains is the impression that the sounds want something, that they make a vague demand to which we need to react, be it by directing our attention toward them and keeping them at bay cognitively or by resorting to flight. The testimony of one victim, Ruhal Ahmed, points exactly in this direction: "It makes you feel like you are going mad. You lose the plot and it's very scary to think that you might go crazy because of all the music, because of the loud noise, and because after a while you don't hear the lyrics at all, all you hear is heavy banging."[11] This "heavy banging" is not an event that can be apprehended in a neutral way, but is an assault calling for a reaction that can't be carried out. Still, it wasn't arbitrary noise that was used, but sounds of very specific kinds. Whereas in Northern Ireland high-pitched whistles or crying babies were used, where the sound's demand is not purely acoustic,[12] now torturers employ music. There are types of music that seem to embody this "heavy banging" particularly well, which brings me to my second point.

The title of my essay refers to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music philosophy, with its depiction of music as a "language of feeling." Theorists and composers of the time assumed a natural correspondence between music and emotions that they tended to emancipate from the more strongly codified signification that formed the basis of the baroque *Affektenlehre* (doctrine of affects). This correspondence was supposed to be immediate and graspable without any background knowledge or formal training—a conception that is still familiar to us today. Music expresses feelings, or so it seems, and makes them comprehensible in all their subtle detail.

Richard Wagner's text on Beethoven gives a good example of this theory: "The Object of the tone perceived is brought into immediate rapport with the Subject of the tone emitted: without any reasoning go-between we understand the cry for help, the wail, the shout of joy, and straightaway answer in its own tongue."[13] The acrimonious discussion between supporters of this aesthetic and those of formal approaches like Hanslick's, with its polemical thrust against the "rotten aesthetics of feeling" (*verrottete Gefühlsästhetik*),[14] need not concern us here. Significantly, even Hanslick does not deny a close connection between music and affectivity (such a denial would not be very convincing), but limits the correspondence to the temporal shapes, the dynamic aspects of affectivity, excluding specific emotions like anger, love, or sorrow in favor of affective gestures like vehemence, tenderness, or subduedness.[15] For the time being, suffice it to note some general agreement over the "natural" connection between music and the emotions.

Positing this natural connection is immediately convincing in the case of Western popular music, where so much of today's music appears little more than a subtle (or not-so-subtle) manipulation of the listeners' emotions. Next to the blurry sentimentality of pop ballads there is another affect that figures prominently in several genres of popular music like Heavy Metal: aggressiveness often bordering on physical violence. This has little to do with the lyrical content, where Rage Against the Machine, with its coarse political stance, works just as well as Metallica (although I should mention that Rage Against the Machine was outraged that its music was being used for torture, while Metallica welcomed it, at least in some interviews).

Music like "Enter Sandman," a popular song by Metallica that was used by US torturers, allows for two fundamentally different attitudes: one can move into it, go along with it, and enjoy being moved by its force—which makes it a song suitable for being played in sports arenas—or one can remain outside it and experience it as a violent assault. Either way force is the central feature; for Jonathan Pieslak, this is the basic principle of Heavy Metal in general. The dedicated fan identifies with this force: "The music operates not as a dominating force over the fan, but as an empowering agent."[16] Seen from the outside, the violence of the music (and the often extreme brutality of the lyrics) remains just this: a dominating force.

Suzanne G. Cusick describes the experience as "being utterly at the mercy of a merciless, ubiquitous power."[17] Also, the fan's identification has some prerequisites: an affinity for this kind of music and an environment that is not in itself threatening or dangerous. Even so it must remain an intermittent activity, as even James Hetfield, Metallica's lead singer, admits.[18] None of this is the case when the music is used in torture contexts.

Keeping up a detached attitude toward this kind of music is hard enough for the casual listener, and it is completely impossible for the detainee in Iraq or Afghanistan. The effects of the sheer loudness of the music are aggravated by its gesture, its affective dynamics. The prisoner feels exposed to a violent, destructive assault that he or she has no way of evading. It seems appropriate to say that the violent force of the music is understood, even though this does not refer to a purely cognitive process. But there is continuity between cognitive understanding and physical reactions like acceleration of the heartbeat or surges of adrenaline. These reactions are aimed for, *meant* by the music. It reaches its goal not by its structures, but rather by its specific sonority: hammering drums, heavily distorted guitars, and a voice that is always on the verge of screaming.[19]

This kind of music, not surprisingly, is well represented on soldiers' iPods and in their CD collections. Testimonies from the second Iraq war show that soldiers use it, as Pieslak aptly formulates it, as an "inspiration for combat."[20] Obviously, leaving the base to face an unclear and often incomprehensible situation where they are likely to be attacked and might have to kill is not easy, and music by Slayer, Drowning Pool, and Eminem help overcome this anxiety. Discerning the difference between the emotional state of the musician, the expressivity of the music, and the emotional reaction of the hearer, which plays a prominent role in the philosophical debate, is hardly relevant here. As one soldier puts it: "When I needed to get aggressive, I'd put some aggressive music on."[21] One and the same music fulfills a double function: whereas the soldier uses it as a preparation for committing acts of violence, the prisoner experiences it as immediate violence directed against him.[22]

One might assume that music associated with Western male aggression is the only kind employed in this context, but this is not the case. On the torture playlists circulating on the Internet we find the Bee Gees, David Gray, and Sesame Street next to Metallica and Eminem, which I find extremely disconcerting. But before attempting to explain this phenomenon, I want to return to Eduard Hanslick and his arguments against Wagner's aesthetics of feeling. As I mentioned, Hanslick is not arguing against the connection between music and emotion. Rather, he categorically rejects an

aesthetics that considers emotions to be the one and only content of music. According to him, the content of music can only be described as "tonally moving forms" (*tönend bewegte Formen*).[23] Obviously, this raises plenty of questions, but for him it created the possibility of a genuinely musical examination that doesn't rely on nonmusical references at every step. For Hanslick, music is "spirit giving shape to itself from within" (*sich von innen heraus gestaltender Geist*),[24] an organization within the sensible that in itself has mental character.

When he does concede that there are analogies between music and dynamic shapes of emotions, he focuses on the latter. These draw on the affective and bodily dimensions of hearing and the affinity of musical organization to our emotional life, which often endows musical pieces with existential significance. To understand this, we can turn to a concept that developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Daniel Stern proposed. Stern assumes that the first weeks in the cognitive, emotional, and social development of the infant are dominated by the perception of dynamic shapes that are at once affective and kinetic. He calls them "vitality affects"[25] or, in a later text, "temporal feeling shapes."[26] These dynamic gestures, which seem to me to be exactly what Hanslick has in mind, structure the experiential world of the small infant. At this stage there is no distinction among the cognitive, the affective, and the kinetic, nor between the self and the other (even though the latter differentiation is, according to Stern, a product of these dynamic structures). In this sense, vitality affects are not perceived as objects at a distance, but rather as performed, and the gestural shapes of the parents' movements cause immediate resonances in the child. My thesis is that music functions primarily on this level, as well, and no matter how sophisticated its structures may be, they retain the affective and kinetic field of resonance of their origin.[27]

These affectively charged forms play a central role in Western tonal music: the cadence as the basic principle can be described as a taking off from and returning to an energetic center, a play of expectation and disappointment, tension and relaxation, and it is experienced intellectually, cognitively, affectively, and physically at the same time. Repetition functions as a kind of anchor facilitating orientation.[28]

This is true even for very simple music, where the basic principles lie on the very surface. How much complexity one is willing and able to deal with in music depends on practice and personal preferences. Music that is too complex for us sometimes completely bypasses us, but when we are confronted with music that we consider too simple, we don't just feel underchallenged—we can find it a nerve-racking experience. This kind of

reaction would not be possible if we weren't involved on all receptive levels at once, from kinetic movement and affective involvement to intellectual comprehension, with the forms and structures that we hear. Our freedom to decide if we want to follow these basic structures or not is limited: the affective dimension of hearing and the organized form of music—provided that it is sufficiently familiar—join forces and constitute acoustic events that make demands so insistent that evading them becomes nearly impossible. The simpler and more repetitive the music is, the more insidious it is in this respect.

Turning to the "torture playlists," we find a song that is of such simplicity and manipulates the listeners' emotions so crudely that even among songs for small children it appears particularly imbecile: the theme song from the TV program *Barney and Friends*. Most likely, adults who hear this song will try to avoid having to listen to it again. Paying attention to one's own reactions, one might observe the response I described at the beginning: we might say that it would be torture to be forced to listen to this song ten times in a row, but of course it wouldn't be *real* torture. Those who live or work with children and thus have some experience in listening to children's music know how these songs force their way into one's mind, but comparing this nuisance with waterboarding or having one's fingernails extracted seems extreme. The composer of this song displays exactly this reaction: "It's absolutely ludicrous. A song that was designed to make little children feel safe and loved was somehow going to threaten the mental state of adults and drive them to the emotional breaking point?"[29] Yes, indeed.

Once again this is a very obvious case, and even though it leads in a different direction than metal and hip-hop, it is immediately plausible. Precisely the fact that the movement we find ourselves subjected to has a mental, intellectual dimension is what makes the song so nerve-racking. But still, this is not all. We still need to ponder the disturbing fact that some of the music that was used in torture was neither violent and aggressive nor as simple as this famous product of the culture industry's "children's department."

Take David Gray's "Babylon" as an example: there is nothing in this song that points to the possibility of its being used to torture someone. Apparently it was selected not because of any musical properties, but because of the superficial association of the title—in other words, its choice was completely arbitrary. It is a light, friendly, fairly interesting song that nonetheless works just as well as the previous examples. The question then is: are there any musical properties that warrant this kind of use?

Apparently these would have to be qualities it shares with countless other pop songs: it has a continuous, rather simple rhythm, it is catchy, even inviting, and it has a structure that is not too complex without being tedious. What's so terrible about all this?

Binyam Mohamed describes the use of music during his torture as follows: "There was loud music, Slim Shady and Dr. Dre for 20 days. I heard this non-stop over and over, I memorized the music, all of it."[30] The mechanism behind music torture lies hidden in these last words. For lack of a better description, Binyam associates the fact that the music has been burned into his brain with an activity he himself performed. This is very close to the truth. The mere fact that the music is playing over and over again would not be a problem if the mental-emotional activity of going along with it could simply be stopped, leaving just a harmless kind of background noise. However, extreme loudness, context, and the music itself all work together to make sure that this is impossible to achieve. At first the conscious effort to memorize the songs may have been an attempt to deal with them by appropriating them, as it were. By and by this activity is overcome by an inescapable force coercing the victim into reenacting the structures of the music, leaving him no room for anything else and making it impossible to keep it at a distance. Songs like David Gray's will not dissolve into "heavy banging," even after one thousand repetitions. They will remain organized, structured sensibility, and repetition will forge precisely this structure into a weapon.

This form of violence is exceedingly subtle. While the music of Metallica could be turned into the acoustic equivalent of physical violence, here it is the victim's own mental activity that becomes a means of torture. In a way this is a variation of the "victim's fight against himself,"[31] an expression Keller coined to describe passive methods of torture like hanging victims from their hands or forcing them to stand for hours on end—only here it is not the body's weight that becomes a cause of anguish, but the insatiable activity of the mind that is unable to fight off the incessant demand arising from the music, and to prevent the seemingly endless repetitions from being burned into one's memory.

The long-term effects of this no-touch violence appear to be exactly the same as those of physical torture. When the journalist Donovan Webster played David Gray's song to Haj Ali, who had been tortured with precisely this song in Abu Ghraib, to confirm that this is indeed the right piece of music, Ali collapsed. Moustafa Bayoumi reports in *The Nation*: "Ali ripped the earphones off his head and started crying. 'He didn't just well up with tears,' Webster later told me. 'He broke down sobbing.'"[32] The extreme

loudness may have been what nearly made his head burst initially. But now the cause of his reaction is the music itself.

The whole repertoire of music torture is made up of pop songs with their continuous, repetitive structures. Considering this, then, it is hard to imagine a pop song that could not be used, while it is equally hard to imagine the use of a classical sonata with its complex structure and long dramatic curves. If contemporary classical music had been utilized, it probably would have been perceived as a mass of dissociated sounds, i.e., as noise, not primarily as music. But what was also missing completely is any kind of non-European music. Would music torture in Guantánamo, in Iraq, and in Afghanistan have worked if the music of the Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum, *the* musical icon of the Arab world, had been employed? If what I have argued above about the mechanisms at work is correct, the answer would have to be "yes." The fact that it *wasn't* used brings me to my fourth point, the cultural dimension.

Again, there is a very pragmatic reason for its lack of use: availability. While Metallica and David Gray were on most soldiers' iPods, Umm Kulthum most likely wasn't. Besides this, perpetrators place some importance on the cultural component, thus making country music the third genre besides Metal and hip-hop that played an important role in torture sessions. Like David Gray's song, country music is usually neither particularly aggressive nor exceedingly repetitive—its obvious association with US culture is what counts. This will hardly have made the torture more effective—if David Gray, Metallica, and the *Barney* theme song can be used, country won't make that much of a difference, but it does add another dimension. Even though almost any type of music will do, the victim remembers very well to what kind of music he was subjected. American pop or country music may be perceived as a symbol of worldwide cultural imperialism and hegemony, and as such be a target of hatred. In being used as an instrument of torture, its imperialist and forceful character is not denied, but, on the contrary, made explicit. Compared to this, the political stance of the respective musicians who may be highly critical of all this—like Rage Against the Machine—is of little importance. For someone who does not recognize these internal differences, the impression remains the same, and even the Dixie Chicks remain a symbol of American culture.

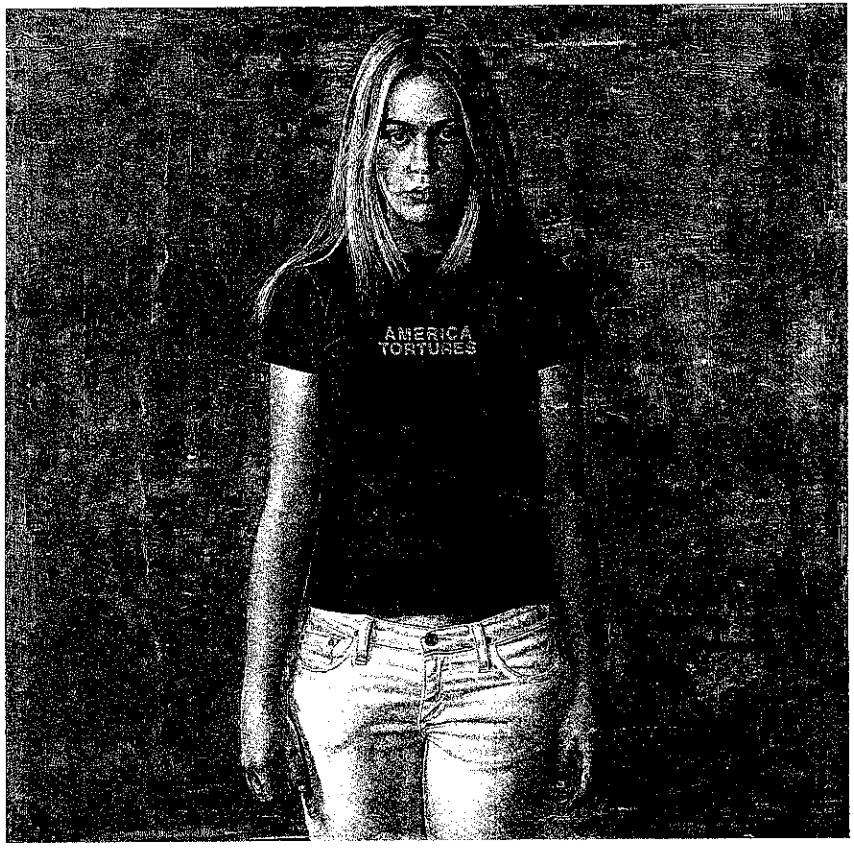
One aspect of a lot of pop music that was directed specifically at Muslim detainees is its blatant sexualization. Playing them songs by Christina Aguilera seems to follow a similar logic to draping women's underwear over the heads of detainees at Abu Ghraib or forcing them to masturbate in front of female army personnel. However, I have my doubts about

the analogy. My guess is that, after prompting a reaction of disgust and resistance, the sexual content of the music has little specific effect.

More likely, the cultural component is hard for US intellectuals to bear (it should be recalled that I am writing from a German perspective). In the article quoted above, Bayoumi writes: "With torture music, our culture is no longer primarily a means of individual expression or an avenue to social criticism. Instead, it is an actual weapon, one that represents and projects American military might. Cultural differences are exploited, and multiculturalism becomes a strategy for domination."[33] It's not just that torture practices utilizing music discourage victims and others in their social and cultural surroundings from adopting a friendly attitude toward US culture (and Western culture in general). The fact that arbitrary examples of Western popular music can easily be turned into instruments of torture, regardless of the musicians' political attitudes and the internal differences so cherished by musicians and listeners, is in itself highly worrying.

This kind of torture in general might be called cultural torture. Elaine Scarry has shown that, in a way, torture always has this dimension, and the use of everyday objects amounts to a kind of recoding of the world of objects in its cultural familiarity: "The room, both in its structure and its content, is converted into a weapon, deconverted, undone. Made to participate in the annihilation of the prisoners, made to demonstrate that everything is a weapon, the objects themselves, and with them the fact of civilization, are annihilated: there is no wall, no window, no door, no bathtub, no refrigerator, no chair, no bed."[34] Now art as a mental-affective formation of sensibility is included in this recoding. It may well be that the victims will not be able to tolerate any kind of music after they have been subjected to this treatment, be it country music or the folk music of their home countries. Consequently, triggers for traumatic flashbacks are omnipresent in a world such as ours, which is pervaded by popular music. The more these triggers are generalized, from specific songs to certain genres or even to music in general, the harder it will be for victims to escape them. It makes sense that musicians take a stand against this form of torture (the initiative *zero dB* is an important example).[35]

In the end music torture is alarming because it is so easy to realize, because it points to the fact that there is little in the cultural world that cannot be utilized as an instrument of torture, because it seems to be hard to recognize it as torture and much easier to justify it as comparably harmless. What is particularly alarming is that for all these reasons, we are likely to hear more of it in the future.



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